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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 002107

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ANNAN CYPRUS PLAN: ISTANBUL COMMENTATORS

ASK WHETHER IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

REF: A) ANKARA 8778 B) ATHENS 4121

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Turks in Istanbul continue to debate the merits and drawbacks of a possible Cyprus settlement in the wake of Denktas's acceptance of the UN plan as a "basis for negotiations." Consensus among the experts with whom we have spoken in Istanbul (including Turkish Cypriots, journalists, and academics) is that the plan is a good one, albeit with some serious flaws. All of them look first and foremost to Ankara for clues on how Turkey will act in the coming weeks and months. They believe that Denktas's conditional approval of the plan was inevitable (he could not afford to appear obstructionist in the face of pressure from the new Justice and Development Party (AKP) government), but that the Turkish side (and perhaps the Greek) will not be prepared to negotiate a plan for signature before the December 12 Copenhagen Summit. Furthermore, most of our interlocutors are convinced that the signals that the EU gives Turkey with regard to its membership bid at the summit are likely to have a major impact on Turkey's position in the upcoming Cyprus negotiations. In the end, however, many of those we spoke to believe that the Annan plan is simply too good to be true -- the Greek Cypriots will ultimately either reject the deal outright or throw up unrealistic demands to ensure that no final agreement is reached. End Summary.

The Most Pro-Turkish Plan Ever

12. (C) Murat Munir, a well-regarded journalist for Sabah newspaper (and a Turkish-Cypriot himself) told poloff that the Annan proposal was the "most pro-Turkish plan" ever presented. He and others had only high praise for how the plan meets Turkish demands for sovereignty and equality in its "common-state" formula. Kemal Kirisci, an expert on international affairs at Bogazici University, was also impressed by many of the details, including provisions for ensuring that Cyprus not be in a position to block Turkey's EU bid and for extending to both Greek and Turkish nationals the same entry and residency rights (a major concession, he noted, in light of Turkey's position outside the EU). Oddly enough, one of the only criticisms we heard of the administrative arrangements was that the "component states" (as opposed to the "common state") were given too much authority. Niyazi Bekiroglu, President of the Association of Turkish Cypriots in Turkey, explained to poloff that Greek immigration to the Turkish side may ultimately enable them to wrest control of local administration.

We Give up Beaches, Farmland -- and are left with Mountains

13. (C) For the most part, criticism of the plan has focused not on the administrative arrangements, but on the territorial concessions and provisions for refugee return. "We are being asked to give up the pristine beaches, the fertile farmland, and the port and water resources of Guzelyurt (Morphou). What are we left with?... The mountains," Bekiroglu lamented (Note: Bekiroglu claims that his views largely reflect those of the 150,000 Turkish Cypriots living in Turkey). Cyprus watchers in Istanbul are still buzzing about the recent public remarks by former Turkish President Kenan Evren about how the Turkish military in 1974 never intended to take as much territory as they did and that they did so with the expectation that such land be used as a bargaining chip at the negotiating table. When pressed on the issue of territory, all of those we spoke to admitted that such concessions (subject to some minor changes to the maps and special provisions regarding water and port rights in Guzelyurt) are possible.

A Flood of Greek Refugees?

14. (C) Conceding that the territorial concessions might

ultimately be acceptable, Bekiroglu admitted that he was more concerned about the provisions allowing for the return of Greek refugees. According to Bekiroglu's calculations, the territorial concessions, the return of Greek refugees, the concurrent displacement of Turkish Cypriots, and the need for many non-Cypriot mainland Turks to return home will lead to the unacceptable displacement of a majority of the existing population in the TRNC. Additionally, even with the annual limitations provided for in the plan, Bekiroglu worries that Greek immigration combined with Turkish emigration will quickly lead to unacceptably large Greek minorities (or even majorities) in certain areas on the Turkish side of the island. Munir, too, argued that allowing Greeks to return to the north may ultimately undermine the viability of an agreement. Although Munir concedes that the principle of refugee return may be necessary (although he suspects few will rush back), neither of the publics on either side of the Green Line is psychologically prepared to lower that long-standing barrier. Munir said that his personal experience on the island suggests to him that the suspicion and distrust harbored in equal measure on both parts of the island would lead quickly to renewed violence if the communities are brought together too quickly.

Ankara Calls the Shots

15. (C) Even assuming that the two publics come to support a settlement, Munir argues that it will require concerted pressure from Ankara to overcome those in the TRNC that have a vested economic interest in maintaining the status quo. Most of our interlocutors seem convinced that the new AKP government would like to see a settlement. The million-dollar questions, however, are: What does the Turkish deep state think? Is AK's recent electoral mandate sufficient to sway the National Security Council (NSC) debates? Kirisci and a former Turkish diplomat both argued that the military and more conservative elements of the secular establishment will be heavily influenced by the signals that Turkey gets on its membership bid from the December 12 EU Copenhagen Summit. If (as Turkish President Sezer suggested in his remarks at the end of the NATO Prague Summit) the Europeans are engaging in "double-talk," Turkey may feel that they cannot abandon the Turkish Cypriots to a double-dealing, anti-Turkish EU. Note: Both also feel that Turkey may have made a tactical error in pushing for a "date" for negotiations. It may be possible, they claim, to come up with some other sufficiently positive message that might convince the Euro-skeptics in Turkey. End Note.

Doomed to Failure?

16. (C) Our more pessimistic interlocutors believe that the deal will either be dashed to pieces on the rocks of the Copenhagen Summit or will founder on the shoals of Greek Cypriot opposition. Bekiroglu, for example, suspects that the entire Annan plan is an EU trap. Having "bought" the support of a select group of influential Turkish journalists (including Mehmet Ali Birand and Murat Munir), the EU seeks only to secure Turkish acquiescence and a Greek vote for EU enlargement at Copenhagen. Others, including Bogazici University Professor Gun Kut, argued that the plan is simply to pro-Turkish to ever be approved by the Greek Cypriots. Even assuming that Ankara throws its weight behind a settlement, they expect the Greek Cypriots to reject the plan in the proposed referendum (the publication of a recent poll showing that 64 percent of Greek Cypriots oppose the plan has not gone unnoticed in Istanbul) or simply put forth unacceptable demands to ensure a breakdown in negotiations.

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